

Sūrah Fāṭir

Introduction

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Sabā', the previous *sūrah*. Hence there is not much difference between the central themes of the two. The subject of Sūrah Fāṭir is monotheism. It begins with an acknowledgement of gratitude to God and refutation of the divinity of the angels. Then under monotheism important aspects of prophethood and life hereafter that were necessary for the purpose of warning and in harmony with the period of revelation of this *sūrah* are delineated. In the previous *sūrah*, readers may remember, the divinity of the angels and the jinn was refuted. In this *sūrah*, the divinity of the angels is refuted in relatively clearer terms. The reason for this is that they held the most significance among the deities worshipped by the Idolaters of Arabia.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-3): God alone is worthy of gratitude. He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He created the angels as well and bestowed on them abilities and powers as deemed appropriate by His wisdom. Angels have no independent authority and say. All blessings and sustenance are the in the hands of God. If He wants to grant them to someone, no one can stop Him and if He wants to withhold them from someone no one can have them granted. Hence He alone is worthy of worship. Worshipping someone other than Him is merely ignorance and foolishness.

Verses (4-8): An assurance is sounded to the Prophet (sws) that if his people are rejecting him, then they are only following the footsteps of their predecessors and will meet the same fate as they. They have been lured away and they are now in the grasp of God's law. He should not fret over them and consign their matter to God.

The Quraysh are warned that what Prophet Muḥammad (sws) is threatening them with is bound to happen; hence they must not be deceived by their worldly success and not lured by Satan. He is their open enemy and they should regard an enemy not less than an enemy. Very naïve is a person who makes friends with an enemy.

Verses (9-10): A clear testimony to the Day of Judgement is referred to and a warning is issued that he who wants to be near God on that Day must not lead his life on the basis of false support. On that day, no one will be able to procure this nearness on the basis of his alleged deities.

The only thing that will be of benefit to him on that day are the pure words – the words of *tawhīd* – and these words receive acclaim through good deeds; he who wants the honour of the Hereafter should embrace faith and do good deeds. All other paths are merely self-deception and their fate is eternal doom.

Verses (11-18): Wealth and children and abundance in worldly resources are a blessing of God. Whether a person is given a long life or a short one, it is in the hands of God. No one has any say in any of these things. The harmony found in the conflicting elements of this universe clearly shows that it is being governed by the all-powerful and sustaining God. Other deities neither have any say nor will they be of any benefit on the Day of Judgement.

People are warned that they have been informed of the actual reality. If they do not give it due importance, they will only ruin themselves and not harm God in any way. God does not need them; it is they who need Him. The Prophet (sws) is assured that his preaching will influence only those whose hearts are vibrant and living; as for those whose hearts are dead, he should leave them alone. The fate that has been ordained for them will surely be met by them.

Verses (19-28): Details are provided about believers and disbelievers. The wisdom behind the contradiction and conflict found in this universe is alluded to: just as the Almighty has created light and darkness and the creation of both these elements is based on wisdom and expediency, in a similar manner this clash between belief and disbelief is also based on God's wisdom. Thus, one must not expect that every person will embrace faith. Only those people will accept faith who have the radiance of knowledge and cognizance in them and who duly value these blessings.

Verses (29-38): A certain group among the People of the Book is praised who in spite of all the disorder around them adhere to the Book of God. It is also said that just as they have had the good fortune of adhering to the Torah, they will be fortunate to profess belief in the Qur'ān. This is because the Qur'ān has come in accordance with the predictions about it found in the Torah and other scriptures. After the Torah the Almighty has done a great favour to these unlettered Arabs by giving them the Qur'ān as through this Book they have been given the leadership of the world on the condition that they give due importance to it. It is then asserted that though there are ingrates and mean among them, but at the same time there are sensible and those among them who take lead in doing virtuous deeds. It is these people who will profess faith in the Qur'ān. As for those who do not value this favour and gift of God, they will meet the same fate as the one ordained by God for such people.

Verses (39-41): The Quraysh are warned that they are not the first nation of the world; in fact, they have come after many nations that lived prior

to them; Hence, there is no reason that He will not implement His justice on them the way He implemented His justice on the previous nations. God does not have different criteria of justice; He has the same scale for all; He is giving respite to the Quraysh in spite of their rebelliousness. They should not regard this to be their success; they are in fact accruing further loss. God is gracious and forgiving and that is because He is giving them respite. However, when He seizes them, none of their alleged deities will be able to help them. The heavens and the earth remain at their place because of God; this is not because of deities.

Verses (42-45): The Quraysh are reminded that before the arrival of Muḥammad (sws) they would express their fervour that if a prophet comes to them they will become the most guided nation of the world; yet when a prophet has come to them they are busy day and night in conspiring against him and are thereby inviting the wrath of God which always visits those who reject their messenger. They should remember that if God wants to seize someone immediately, no one can stop Him. However, He has appointed a time of His decision for each nation.

Even a cursory glance at the above mentioned analysis of the discourse of the *sūrah* portrays its internal coherence and its relationship with the previous *sūrah*. Now with the name of God, I begin the exegesis of this *sūrah*. (Only He grants the urge and opportunity and only He guides to what is right).

Section I: Verses (1-8)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنَحَةٍ مَّتَنًى وَثَلَاثَ وَرُبَاعٍ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (١) مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ (٣) وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ (٤) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُمُ بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ (٥) إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ (٦) الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ (٧) أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا

يَصْنَعُونَ (٨)

Only God is worthy of gratitude – Creator of the heavens and the earth, One Who has made angels as messengers with two, three and four pairs of wings. He augments His creation according to His will. Indeed, God has power over all things. (1)

No one can withhold the blessings God opens for people and what He withholds none can open it apart from Him. And He alone is the Mighty, the Wise. (2)

People! Bear in mind God's favour to you. Is there any other creator who provides for you from the heavens and earth? There is no God but Him. So, where then do you turn away? (3)

And if they deny you, do not grieve; many a prophet before you were denied and to God alone all matters shall be presented. (4)

People! The promise of God is bound to be fulfilled; so let not the life of this world deceive you, nor let the deceiver Satan deceive you about God. Indeed, Satan is your enemy: therefore, treat him as an enemy. He tempts his followers only to make them the firewood of Hell. Those who disbelieved shall be sternly punished and for those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds there is forgiveness and a rich reward. (5-7)

Can he whose foul deeds have been made fair to him; thus he regards them to be good [be expected to accept faith]? Thus God alone leads astray whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases. So do not fret yourself in their grief. God is aware of what they are doing. (8)

Explanation

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَّثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعٍ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ¹

Readers may remember that the previous *sūrah* also began with the words الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ. Evident from this is the similarity of temperament of both *sūrahs*. The foundation of religion rests on monotheism and the foundation of monotheism is gratitude. This is because it is God alone Who has brought the heavens and the earth into existence and all the inner and outer favours people have are bestowed to them by Him.

In جَاعِلِ the expression جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَّثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعٍ is a permutative (*badl*) of فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ. The purpose of this mention of the specific after the general is that the God Who is the

1. Only God is worthy of gratitude – Creator of the heavens and the earth, One who has made angels as messengers with two, three and four pairs of wings. He augments His creation according to His will. Indeed, God has power over all things.

Creator of the heavens and the earth is the One Who has created angels as messengers. Angels are specially mentioned because in Arab mythology they held the most importance. Arabs regarded them to be favoured daughters of God and would worship them in this capacity. They believed that if these angels are happy they will be able to win over everything for themselves. This belief actually pushed God into a being having only a ceremonial status. They would only ceremonially believe in God but the fountainhead of all their thanksgiving and worship would be their idols who they had carved out in the name of angels. It is to refute this baseless belief of theirs that it is stated that it is God Who should be regarded as the fountainhead of thanksgiving and He alone deserves gratitude. He created the heavens and the earth from nothingness and it is He who deputed angels as messengers. In other words, these angels neither have any share in the creation of the heavens and earth nor have any share in divinity: they only deliver God's decrees to His messengers.

The implication is that people regard envoys of God to have a share in divinity and consider the messengers of God to have Godly powers and thus worship them. Such people have neither recognized the status of God nor of His messengers nor of themselves.

The word *أُولِي أجنحة* is an attribute of *رُسلًا* and the word *أجنحة* is a plural of *جناح*. The word *جناح* means arms of human beings and also means wings of birds. Here this word is used for the angels. Hence, it is of the nature of *mutashābihāt*: only God knows its reality. The purpose is to inform us that not all angels are of the same status. The Almighty, keeping in view various expedencies, has created them in different molds with different abilities and potentials. Some can fly higher and some not as high. Some fly with two wings while others with three and still others with four.

These wings belong to the angels and so only God knows the extent of their flying-power. Moreover, this mention of four is not meant to mention a limit. The purpose here is to merely refer to difference in their categories and status. Hence, this verse does not negate the existence of angels having even more flying-power. Thus certain narratives mention a greater number of wings of Gabriel. It is evident from this that his flying-power and accessing ability is more than the rest of the angels. The purpose of mentioning these details here is that the naïve who have accorded divinity to the angels are not aware of the exalted court of God. The angels have even different powers and abilities in accessing distances what to speak of being His associates. In Sūrah Ṣaffāt, this acknowledgement is expressed through the tongue of Gabriel thus:

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُونَ وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ (٣٧: ١٦٤-١٦٦)

And for each of us is an appointed place and We stand arrayed before God. And We glorify Him. (37:164-166)

The words *يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ* imply that God has the power to create creatures of any strength, potential and ability. If He has created the angels for the communication of His messages, then this is a wondrous manifestation of His power and wisdom. If these angels have various status, then this difference is also an expression of God's majesty as He has power to increase any of His creatures in their form and ability. This increase or decrease of potentials and abilities is in His authority. If He has increased some in this, then this too has specific limits. No one has the authority to claim divinity on its basis nor should others include him in this divinity.

مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢)

The verse states why God alone is worthy of gratitude. It is said that whatever door of blessing God wants to open for them, He can; no one can stop or withhold these blessings. Similarly, if He wants to deprive someone of these blessings no one has the power to stop Him. In Sūrah Zumar, this subject is discussed in the following words:

قُلْ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَنِيَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ هَلْ هُنَّ كَاشِفَاتُ ضُرِّهِ أَوْ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ هَلْ هُنَّ مُمْسِكَاتُ رَحْمَتِهِ (٣٩: ٣٨)

Say: "Do you think then that, if God intended to afflict me, these things which you worship could relieve my affliction; or that if He intended to bless me in some way, they could stop Him?" (39:38)

The implication is that when this is the reality, then it is their mere foolishness to invoke angels and the jinn thinking them to be ones having authority to harm and benefit people. Only God has this authority. Hence He alone is worthy of gratitude and worship.

It may be noted that in this verse first a feminine pronoun is used and

2. No one can withhold the blessings God opens for people and what He withholds none can open it apart from Him. And He alone is the Mighty, the Wise.

then a masculine one for the same noun (رَحْمَةً). The reason is that in the first place the external form of the verb is intended, and at the other its meaning. Several examples of this usage have been cited in this exegesis.

The word *مِنْ بَعْدِ إِمْسَاكِهِ* actually means *مِنْ بَعْدِ إِمْسَاكِهِ*. It is said in verse 41 ahead: (٤١) وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أُمْسَكُهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنْ بَعْدِهِ (And should they fall, none can hold them back but Him.)

The words *وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ* imply that it is God Who is the real dominant and sovereign being. He opens and He stops and these acts are as per the requisites of His wisdom. That is why He is the Wise One as well.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ
وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ³

What is mentioned in the previous verse in principle is now re-stated here in a conclusive manner. People are asked to bear in mind each and every favour of God and reflect on them. The word *نِعْمَتَ* here denotes its complete genre. The verse floats a question before people for their deliberation: can they say that the livelihood they get from the heavens and the earth, the rain that pours down from the heavens and the multifarious things produced by earth are given to them by some other creator than God?

Without waiting for any reply from them, the Qur'ān answers the question by the words: *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ* (there is no god but God). One reason that the Qur'ān has taken upon itself to answer the question is that none else but the reply it gave is correct. The second reason is that the Idolaters of Arabia who are addressed in this *sūrah* would themselves give this very answer, as is evident from other places of the Qur'ān. The verse goes on to assert that when what has been said is the real fact, then why have they lost their senses and made up other deities.

وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ⁴

This verse sounds an assurance to the Prophet (sws) that if such stubborn people are rejecting him, then this should not be a cause of wonder or distress for him. Such people have denied messengers before

3. People! Bear in mind God's favour to you. Is there any other creator who provides for you from the heavens and earth? There is no God but Him. So where then do you turn away?

4. And if they deny you, do not grieve; many a prophet before you were denied and to God alone all matters shall be presented.

him as well. The implication is that it is not his mistake that they have adopted this attitude; it is the specific mentality of these rejecters which is responsible for this. The Prophet (sws) should leave them alone; they are following the footsteps of their predecessors; so they too will meet the fate met by them.

The words *وَالِلّٰهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ* mean that all matters return to God and will return to Him. What is implied is that God is not unconcerned or disinterested in what is happening here; everything is coming before Him and will come in the future as well. He will give the final verdict; so the Prophet (sws) should trust God in what he does and leave the matter of these people to Him. Reference is also found in this of the fact that those who worship other deities besides God will see the fate of this baseless desire they are showing.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ⁵

After sounding assurance to the Prophet (sws), his opponents are threatened that they should not regard as bluff the warning sounded to them of the fate of previous nations. The warning of God is bound to materialize. The affluence they possess in this world should not deceive them. They think that since they are blessed with affluence and riches in this world, hence this necessarily means that they are on the right path. They make fun of the Prophet (sws) that why and from where will the promised doom come upon them. However, when the time comes of this divine promise to materialize, they will see that what they were being threatened with was right in front of them.

The word *الْغُرُورُ* means “the deceiver” and here it denotes Satan because he is the greatest deceiver. The words *وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ* imply that Satan, the deceiver should not deceive them in the matter of God. God is very merciful and magnanimous and also very stern in retribution and mighty. If, in spite of their arrogance and spreading anarchy in the society, God gives them respite, then they should not be led to believe that they are beyond His grasp or that their alleged deities have saved them or that they will be able to save them when God catches them. Neither does God have a partner nor can anyone stop Him from seizing anyone. Satan has lured them away in order to lead them to Hell. It may be kept in mind that the basis of all luring away from the truth is that which relates to God’s attributes. For this reason, it is from here that Satan tries to make his move. It is from this very danger that the verse

5. People! The promise of God is bound to be fulfilled; so let not the life of this world deceive you, nor let the deceiver Satan deceive you about God.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّبَكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ (٨٢:٦) (O man! What is it that has deceived you about your Beneficent Lord (82:6)) sounds a warning.

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ (٦)

The verse says that Satan is their inveterate enemy and people must consider an enemy as enemy and be on guard from his moves. What wisdom can there be in they consigning themselves to him by regarding him to be their chief and leader whereas he is their foe. They should listen up to the fate of such an attitude: if they resign themselves to him, then his sole purpose is to lead them to the pit of Hell.

الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ (٧)

This verse is an explanation of the inevitable promise of God mentioned in verse five earlier. The implication is that no one should be deceived in any way in the matter of God that this world will continue on with its journey without any distinction being made between vice and virtue, good and evil. Those who are of this view have been utterly deceived by Satan in the matter of God's attributes. A day is bound to come wherein the disbelievers will face a grievous doom and the believers who did righteous deeds will be worthy of forgiveness and a great reward.

أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ (٨)

This verse sounds an assurance to the Prophet (sws) that if these people are not professing faith, then this is not because of any fault of his; it is because they are not facing the law of God. So he should not fret over them and leave them to themselves. Whatever they are doing is fully in the knowledge of God. Since He is fully aware of their deeds, He will deal with them accordingly.

The answer to the conditional clause *أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا* is suppressed. If this suppression is revealed, the complete sentence would

6. Indeed, Satan is your enemy: therefore, treat him as an enemy. He tempts his followers only to make them the firewood of Hell.

7. Those who disbelieved shall be sternly punished and for those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds there is forgiveness and a rich reward.

8. Can he whose foul deeds have been made fair to him; thus he regards them to be good [be expected to accept faith]? Thus God leads astray whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases. So do not fret yourself in their grief. God is aware of what they are doing.

be something to the effect: “Can you guide him whose evil deeds have been made fair to him and he regards his vices to be virtues?” The implication is that it is against the established practice of the Almighty for such people to receive guidance; so the Prophet (sws) should not worry about such people and consign their matter to God. In Sūrah Zumar, what is mentioned here is stated in the following words:

أَفَمَنْ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ أَفَأَنْتَ تُنْقِذُ مَنْ فِي النَّارِ (٣٩: ١٩)

He who has become worthy of punishment, will then you be able to rescue him who is in Hell. (39: 19)

It is evident from this that one state of a person is that he sins but he feels guilty about it and another state is that his foul deeds seem fair to him such that he regards them to be his real talent and style and a way to development and a requirement of culture and education. In the first state one can expect a person to correct himself if he is reminded and warned but the second state signifies perversion of the heart and intellect. The Qur’ān calls such a state as *khatm-i qulūb* (heart-sealing) or *rayn* (rust). He who is afflicted by this malady is facing the law of God; no one can now guide him.

The words *فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ* point to the established practice of God prescribed by him about providing guidance or depriving people from it. I have explained it at many instances in this exegesis. It is further explained later in the *sūrah*.

The words *فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ* advise the Prophet (sws) to not fret over such people. They themselves have committed intellectual and spiritual suicide. If they are not accepting faith, then this is not because there is some mistake on his part in calling them to the truth; the fact is that their hearts have been sealed; so instead of grieving over them, he should consign their matter to God; He is observing all their pranks and will deal with them in the manner they are worthy of.

The word *حَسْرَاتٍ* can grammatically be an accusative of state or an accusative of cause. Both usages are found in classical Arabic literature. The word *عَلَيْهِمْ*, in my opinion, is related to *حَسْرَاتٍ* the way it is in *يَا حَسْرَةً عَلَى الْعِبَادِ (٣٦: ٣٠)*. The plurality of the word *حَسْرَاتٍ* expresses profundity of sorrow.

Section II: Verses (9-18)

In the succeeding verses, first the promise certain to be fulfilled mentioned in verse 5 earlier is substantiated. After that it is stated that people who want to procure the nearness of God and want to succeed before Him should leave aside procuring the nearness of false deities and adopt the right way. The right way is that a person accepts faith and does righteous deeds. Faith is something which ascends to God, and righteous deeds lend support to it and elevates it. This is the only right way. Those who have forsaken this way and have taken other ones and are also striving day and night to make people leave the right way will one day find their conspiracies shattered.

After that, it is said that increase in wealth and children and increase or decrease in age and other similar things rest with God; angels or jinn or their alleged deities have no say in them. The harmony between conflicting elements of this universe show that only the intention of God Almighty and Powerful is applicable in it. Other than Him, no one has any authority whatsoever.

After that people are informed that it is for their own benefit that they are being invited to a call. God does not need them; on the contrary, they need God. If they accept this call, they will succeed in this world and in the next and if they reject it, they will be doomed. At the same time, an assurance is sounded to the Prophet (sws) by informing him what type of people will accept this call and what type will be deprived from it.

Readers may now proceed to study the verses.

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيَّاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَسُقْنَاهُ إِلَى بَلَدٍ مَيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ (٩) مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَكْرُ أُولَئِكَ هُوَ يَبُورُ (١٠) وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أَنْثَى وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ وَمَا يُعَمِّرُ مِنْ مَعْمَرٍ وَلَا يَنْقُصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ (١١) وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَمَنْ كُلَّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حَلِيَّةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَازِيرَ لِيَتَبَتَّعُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (١٢) يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ذَلِكَمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَالَّذِينَ

تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قِطْمِيرٍ (١٣) إِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُونَ بِشِرْكِكُمْ وَلَا يُنَبِّتُكَ مِثْلُ خَبِيرٍ (١٤) يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ (١٥) إِنْ يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ (١٦) وَمَا ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ بِعَزِيزٍ (١٧) وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى وَإِنْ تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَىٰ حِمْلِهَآ لَا يَحْمِلْ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَمَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ (١٨)

And it is God Who sends forth winds which then set the clouds in motion. We then drive the clouds to some dead land. Thus through this We give new life to the land after it has died. In such a manner will the dead rise. (9)

He who seeks honour, let him know that all honour is for God alone. A pure word rises towards Him and the righteous deed lends support to it. And those who are contriving evil schemes shall be sternly punished, and their schemes will be routed. (10)

And God created you from clay, then from a drop of water and then made you in pairs. And no woman conceives or gives birth except with His knowledge. No person of age is given an increase in age or a reduction in it except that it is written in a register. All this is easy for God. (11)

And the two seas are not alike. One is sweet, quenches the thirst and is pleasant to drink while the other is saltish and bitter. And from both you eat fresh meat and bring out ornaments to wear. And you see how the ships cut across through them so that you seek His bounty and so that you show gratitude. He makes the night to pass into the day, and the day into the night and He has made the sun and the moon subservient. Each orbits for an appointed time. That very God is your Lord. His is the sovereignty. As for those whom you invoke besides Him they have not the slightest power over anything. If you invoke them they will not hear your pleading, and even if they hear you they will not respond to it and on the Day of Judgement they will deny your polytheism. And none can inform the way in the one who is informed can. (12-14)

O People! It is you who stand in need of God. He is self sufficient and has all worthy attributes. If He wants, He will destroy you and replace you with a new creation and this is not difficult for Him at all. (15-17)

And no soul shall bear another's burden. And if a burdened soul asks for help to lift its burden, not the slightest help will be provided to it even from a relative. You can only warn those who fear their Lord even though they cannot see Him, and are steadfast in the prayer. And he who acquires purity acquires it for himself only. And to God shall all return. (18)

Explanation

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيَّاحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا فَسُقْنَاهُ إِلَى بَلَدٍ مَيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ
مَوْتِهَا كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ⁹

An argument is furnished here from the phenomena of nature to substantiate the promise mentioned in verse five earlier. People should not regard it to be far-fetched; it is not the slightest difficult for God to raise people to life again once they die. After all, it is common observation that a land is totally dry and desolate; there is no chance of any vegetation to sprout from it when suddenly God sends winds from somewhere; these winds set the clouds in motion and gather them; then God drives these clouds to that dry land and drenches it with rain; as a result, every part of it enlivens. The verse goes on to state: كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ; ie. in a very similar way, people will rise up on the Day of Judgement. The implication is that God continues to make a nation observe death and life after death in this world. So why do they regard the Day of Judgement to be something impossible. I have referred many times in this exegesis to the fact that this world by its very existence is the best teaching place of what the Qur'ān teaches. If a person uses his intellect and insight, he can find around him a corroboration of every claim made by the Qur'ān.

The style adopted in this verse is also worthy of attention. First the past tense *أَرْسَلَ* is used and then the indefinite tense *تُثِيرُ* is used. After that first person verbs *سُقْنَاهُ* and *أَحْيَيْنَا* occur. This diversity in style has a number of benefits in it. Though this is not the place to go into details, this much should be kept in mind that the past tense only comes to narrate an incident, indefinite tense portrays an existing situation and the first person verbs signify affection.

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ
وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَكْرُ أُولَئِكَ هُوَ يَبُورُ¹⁰

The implication is that the Day of Judgement nevertheless is bound to come and everyone will be brought before God. As for those who seek the correct answer to the question that who will be held in honour before

9. And it is God Who sends forth winds which then set the clouds in motion. We then drive the clouds to some dead land. Thus through this We give new life to the land after it has died. In such a manner will the dead rise.

10. He who seeks honour, let him know that all honour is for God alone. A pure word rises towards Him and the righteous deed lends support to it. And those who are contriving evil schemes shall be sternly punished, and their schemes will be routed.

God and who in dishonour, they should remember that all honour belongs to God; so, whoever will receive honour will receive it because of their relationship with God and because of His endowment.

The words *إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ* state the way to attain this honour: what rises to God from human beings is the word of faith. No other thing can become a source of acquiring His nearness. What supports and augments this word of faith is a righteous deed. Without this deed the word of faith withers away. It is as if the word of faith is like a grape vine which in itself is luxuriant yet its luxuriance and lushness depends on a support on which it can lean upon, grow and develop. This support is achieved by it through a righteous deed. It is this deed which nourishes and nurtures it to bear fruit otherwise just as without a support grape vines shrivel in a similar way without righteous deeds, faith wilts away.

In the opinion of ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās (rta),¹¹ the expression *الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ* refers to the word of faith and the mention of the righteous deed alongside it bears witness that it refers to the word of faith. The word *الطَّيِّبُ* refers to lushness and luxuriance of the word. This is because with regard to the philosophy of religion it is this word which is the foundation of all knowledge and wisdom. He who acquired it, acquired the key to all the treasure of knowledge and wisdom. It is also an acknowledged fact that faith and righteous deeds necessitate one another. Just as righteous deeds have no basis without faith in a similar way without righteous deeds, faith is a lifeless thing. In order to fully grasp this, readers are advised to look up what I have written while explaining verses 24-26 of Sūrah Ibrāhīm.

The Idolaters are explained that they think that their angel deities will earn success and honour for them before God; the fact is that honour belongs to God alone and the sole way to acquire the nearness of God is faith which has the support of righteous deeds. At many places, the Qur’ān has cited the fact that the Idolaters would regard their deities to procure for them God’s nearness. Thus for example, it is said:

مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى (٣٩: ٣)

We worship them only so that they may bring us nearer to God.
(39:3)

At another place, the words are:

وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لِّيَكُونُوا لَهُمْ عِزًّا (١٩: ٨١)

11. See: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 3, 550.

And they have set up other deities besides God so that they can become a source of honour for them. (19:81)

In the verse under discussion, it is this false notion of theirs which is refuted. They are told to come out of this fool's Paradise and if they want to earn honour before God, they should accept faith and do righteous deeds.

The words *وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ* imply that people who instead of facing this reality plot evil schemes to protect their pride and to harm God's religion and His messenger should remember that they will not acquire honour in this way; on the contrary, they are calling for their grievous doom.

The declination of the word *السَّيِّئَاتِ* in the accusative seems a little odd here because the verb does not act transitively in this way. In the opinion of al-Zamakhsharī,¹² this word is an adjective of a suppressed verbal noun and the implied construction is *يَمْكُرُونَ الْمَكْرَاتِ السَّيِّئَاتِ*. This interpretation seems to be correct. An example of this usage can be seen in verse 43 ahead.

The words *وَمَكْرُ أُولَئِكَ هُوَ يَبُورُ* sound a warning. In other words, people who themselves have been misled in this regard and are also making vehement efforts to mislead others in this matter should remember that all these conspiracies of theirs will be routed. The repetition of the inchoative (*mubtadā'*) in the sentence has incorporated a stress in it: these conspiracies will not be able to harm others; on the contrary, these conspiracies themselves will be afflicted with harm and they will become a means of destruction of these people. Further ahead, more light is shed on this subject by the words: *(:) وَلَا يَحِيقُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ* because the truth is a common treasure and a means to success for all. If someone opposes it, he only effaces his own eyes and strikes at this own feet.

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنْثَى وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ وَمَا يُعَمِّرُ مِنْ مُعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يَنْقُصُ مِنْ عُمرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ¹³

The verse states that any increase or decrease in age or number of children is in the knowledge of God and takes place with His directive. The deities of the Idolaters have no role in this. Hence they should turn

12. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 612.

13. And God created you from clay, then from a drop of water and then made you in pairs. And no woman conceives or gives birth except with His knowledge. No person of age is given an increase in age or a reduction in it except that it is written in a register. All this is easy for God.

to God to ask for longevity and children; they should not seek the support of anyone else. It may be kept in mind that wealth and children, life and wealth and other similar wants have always remained a factor that has led people to polytheism. People who are childless or whose children continue to die in infancy or only have female offspring are easily led by Satan towards places of polytheism like altars, graves and mausoleums if these people have superstitious tendencies. In the polytheism of the Idolaters of Arabia, this factor contributed a lot. They did not regard their deities to be the creators of the heavens and the earth but in matters like sustenance, wealth and children they would regard them – in particular the angels – to be very influential. Similarly, they would worship the jinn thinking that they had a say in matters of sickness and ill-health. I have mentioned in Sūrah An‘ām that they would regard certain jinn to be so dangerous that they would even sacrifice their children for them. They contended that if they did not sacrifice a boy or a girl to keep them happy, they will kill all their children. Similarly, those afflicted with sickness would turn to them and supplicate before them to grant them health and a long life. This verse refutes all these superstitions.

The words **وَاللّٰهُ خَلَقَكُمْ مِّنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا** form an introduction for what is stated next. Attention is directed here to the established reality that it is God Who created man from clay and then made his offspring grow and spread through a drop of sperm and created them in pairs. The implication is that every part of this house was made and developed by God and this is a reality which they cannot deny; then after making this system what was the difficulty that afflicted Him that He was compelled to consign matters like sustenance, offspring and longevity to others? Is He Who created them from a drop of fluid, made their generations flourish and created them in pairs so powerless as to look after their affairs referred to above so that they now have to look to other deities for their fulfillment?

The words **وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنْثَىٰ وَلَا تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ** express the necessary outcome of the premise stated earlier: He who has set the family of Adam in procession knows when a woman will get pregnant and whether she carries a male or a female offspring and He also knows when she will give birth and the form and nature of the child. The knowledge of God is specially referred to here because the Idolaters of Arabia never refuted God as the Creator of all; they had this doubt that how can He be aware of all the affairs of this huge and expansive universe; they contended that since this does not seem likely, hence He has consigned many matters like sustenance, children and life-span to His partners and associates. By using the words **إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ**, the Qur‘ān has struck on this

notion of theirs and asserted that the smallest of events that happens in this world is not beyond the knowledge of the Creator.

In the sentence وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِنْ مُعَمَّرٍ وَلَا يُنْقَضُ مِنْ عُمْرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ the word مُعَمَّرٍ does not mean “an old person.” It refers to every person who is given an age to live in this world whether long or short. Zamakhsharī¹⁴ has interpreted this word thus and I think that this is the correct interpretation.

These words further explain what is said above: The age of a person whether short or long is in God’s knowledge and at His bidding. The words إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ are in place of the words بِعِلْمِهِ above. This style further strengthens what was said above. Thus, it is not that God merely knows all these things, all of them are written in a register; they should not think that God will forget anything.

The words إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ refute the doubt cited above with which the Arabs were afflicted: how can God be aware of all these minute details? It was because of these doubts that they invented various deities and partners of God who they thought would help Him in these matters and then went on to worship them in such a manner as if God was now only a ceremonial head who had delegated all His powers to His deputies. These words of the verse refute this notion of theirs: no task is difficult for God so that He may require some helper to accomplish it.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَمِنْ كُلِّ تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَازِيرَ لِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (١٢) يُوبِخُ اللَّيْلُ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُوبِخُ النَّهَارُ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ذَلِكَمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قِطْمِيرٍ (١٣)¹⁵

These verses, through another aspect, refute polytheism and deities. The conflict between opposing elements of nature is a very significant

14. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 613.

15. And the two seas are not alike. One is sweet, quenches the thirst and is pleasant to drink while the other is saltish and bitter. And from both you eat fresh meat and bring out ornaments to wear. And you see how the ships cut across through them so that you seek His bounty and so that you show gratitude. He makes the night to pass into the day, and the day into the night and He has made the sun and the moon subservient. Each orbits for an appointed time. That very God is your Lord. His is the sovereignty. As for those whom you invoke besides Him they have not the slightest power over anything.

factor that leads to polytheism. The Qur'ān has negated it through various aspects and I have been explaining it in this exegesis. Here too the reference is that the existence of opposing entities in this world does not show that different forces are controlling it because besides their outward opposing nature there is deep harmony between them. It is evident from this that a supreme powerful being dominates all these opposing entities and uses them as His wisdom for the collective benefit of the universe.

The verse وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَمِنْ كُلِّ تَاكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَاجِرَ يَتَّبِعُونَ قَالَ إِنَّهُمْ لَمِنْ أَقْسَى الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَا يَشْكُرُونَ states that there are two seas –both different from one another as per their apparent characteristics. The water of one tastes sweet, quenches thirst and is pleasant to drink; that of the other is sour and bitter. Both thump into each other but this never happens that the bitter one is able to turn the sweet one bitter or vice versa. A supreme being makes them follow certain limits even though they strike one another. In Sūrah Raḥmān, the words used are: مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَا يَبْغِيَانِ (٥٥: ١٩- (He has let loose the two oceans: they meet one another. Yet between them is a barrier which they cannot cross, (55:19-20)).

People should see how in spite of being opposite to one another, these seas achieve a higher objective: from both types of seas, they are able to obtain fresh meat in their long sea-journeys and besides this nourishment they are also able to take out pearls from them for embellishment. They also see that these seas have been put to their service so that their ships cut across them so that people can travel from one place to another to obtain the blessings of God and to thank Him as a result. The implication is that people should not get engrossed and entangled in the apparent contradiction found around them between various entities; they should also reflect on the harmony found between them. If they do, they will find out that it is the One powerful and living God Who has created this world and through His power and wisdom has put conflicting entities and forces of this world in the service of man so that he may be grateful to God.

The words يُولِجُ اللَّيْلُ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُؤَلِّجُ اللَّيْلُ فِي النَّهَارِ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ يَجْرِي direct attention to what is just said by employing another example: The case of the day and night which appear before man every day is no different. Both in their apparent outlook seem to be opposite to one another yet there exists great harmony between them as if they complement one another. Both are necessary for the survival of this world and of its inhabitants. Similar is the case of the sun and the moon. The foolish regard them to be deities and worship them even though they testify by their very existence that God has put them to the service of His creation. Thus both with their fixed timetables fervently serve the needs

أَنْتَ وَلِيَّتُنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ (٤١-٤٠: ٣٤)

And bear in mind the day when He will gather all; then He will ask the angels: "Have these people been worshipping you?" They will reply: "Exalted are you. You are our helper against them; in fact they used to worship the jinn." (34: 40-41)

The words *وَلَا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلُ خَبِيرٍ* sound an admonition and a very strong and subtle one indeed. The word *خَبِيرٍ* is not defined by an definite particle to portray its magnitude. The implication is that people should listen up to what is being said to them because only a real cognizant being knows what is hidden from the eyes of people and which will one day manifest before them. No one besides him can inform people the most about what is hidden; yet it their misfortune that they did not give Him due importance and remained caught in their fancies.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ (١٥) إِنْ يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ (١٦) وَمَا ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ بِعَزِيزٍ (١٧)¹⁷

These verses add and strongly add to the admonition stated above. The address is also by the words *يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ* so that everyone should fully listen up that all this elaborate arrangement made for their education and reminding and the day-night effort undertaken by the messenger of God to awaken people from their slumber is not because God is need of these endeavours so that some of His tasks need to be fulfilled through them. God is totally self-sufficient and praiseworthy in His attributes; it is these people who need God – both in this world and in the Hereafter. So self-sufficient is God that if He wants He can destroy all of them and bring forth a new creation in their place. If He decides to do this, it is not the least difficult for Him. It is His mercy and favour on them that in spite of their ungrateful attitude He is continuing to give them respite; it would be better for them to benefit from this respite otherwise they should remember that neither will they be able to harm God in any way nor His messenger; they will only lead themselves to doom.

I have already explained the expression *هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ* at another place that God's being is perfect and complete and this perfection of His is not dependent on anything external to His being. At the same time, He is has all worthy attributes. His relationship with His creation is not on the

17. O People! It is you who stand in need of God. He is self-sufficient and has all worthy attributes. If He wants, He will destroy you and replace you with a new creation and this is not difficult for Him at all.

basis of any need but on entirely on the basis of His mercy and favour:

من نه کردم خلق تا سود ے کنم
بلکه کردم خلق تا جود ے کنم

(I did not create [people] to receive benefit for Myself; in fact, I created them to show them mercy).

وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ وَإِن تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَىٰ جَمِلِهَا لَا يَحْمِلُ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ
إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَمَن تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ¹⁸ (۱۸)

This verse explains from another angle what is said above. It is stated that on that day no soul will bear the burden of another; on the contrary, each soul shall bear its own burden.

Consider the section of the verse: *وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ*. The noun qualified by the word *مُثْقَلَةٌ* is suppressed. The actual expression would be *نَفْسٌ مَُّثْقَلَةٌ* (a soul burdened by its sins). Similarly, in the expression *إِلَىٰ جَمِلِهَا* the *mudāf* (governing noun) is suppressed before *جَمِلِ* and the noun of *كَانَ* ie., *المدعو* is also suppressed. All these suppressions are common in classical Arabic.

The implication is that if a soul burdened by its sins cries out to someone to share its burden it will find none to help it even if it invokes help from its closest relative. The virtuous will not help it because if they did not accompany its sins in the previous world, why will they become its companions in the Hereafter. As for the wrongdoers, they themselves will be buried in their sins; so how could they extend help to anyone.

The words *إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ* sound assurance to the Prophet (sws) to inform his addressees of these facts; if they pay heed, then it is okay; if they do not, then he should leave them alone; his warning can only be effective on those who use their intellect and other faculties of cognizance and fear God even if they have not seen Him and diligently adhere to the prayer; he cannot cure those who want to believe after seeing everything from their eyes; he should consign their matter to

18. And no soul shall bear another's burden. And if a burdened soul asks for help to lift its burden, not the slightest help will be provided to it even from a relative. You can only warn those who fear their Lord even though they cannot see Him, and are steadfast in the prayer. And he who acquires purity acquires it for himself only. And to God shall all return.

God.

The mention of وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ is because adhering to the prayer is the foremost manifestation of faith and a symbol of God's fear. He who fears God even though he has not seen him will definitely show diligence in offering the prayer. He who is heedless of the prayer is heedless of God even though he may make tall claims to faith by his tongue.

The words وَمَنْ تَزَكَّى فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّى لِنَفْسِهِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ point to the benefit of the prayer: he who wants to do away with the burden of his sins and wants to spiritually cleanse himself should be diligent and vigilant in the prayer instead of relying on false support. This will cleanse him of sins and he who acquires this spiritual cleansing will only benefit his own self because God is not in need of any one's worship or obedience; it is His servants who are in need, and everyone is set to return to Him alone.

Section III: Verses (19-28)

The succeeding verses state the types of people who will accept faith and the types who will be deprived from it. In order to understand this reality, attention is directed to the existence of opposite elements of nature in this universe: it has light and it has darkness; similarly, it has heat and it also has coldness. Likewise, there are fertile lands which become lush green because of rain and there also barren lands which in spite of abundant rain do not bear any produce. On a similar note, people also have different tendencies and qualities. People whose hearts are vibrant and living will benefit from this rain which is pouring down on them in the form of the Qur'ān; however, the dead at heart and mind will be deprived of this blessing. Just as God has created heat and coldness, light and darkness for the overall benefit of the universe in a similar manner He has given respite to people who like vice as He has to those who like virtue. This is because it is in this conflict between vice and virtue the potentials of the righteous materialize and are polished and the truth is conclusively delivered to the wrong-doers. Readers may now study these verses in the light of this background.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَى وَالْبَصِيرُ (١٩) وَلَا الظُّلُمَاتُ وَلَا النُّورُ (٢٠) وَلَا الظِّلُّ وَلَا الْحَرُورُ (٢١) وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَحْيَاءُ وَلَا الْأَمْوَاتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ (٢٢) إِنْ أَنْتَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ (٢٣) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ (٢٤) وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ

وَبِالْزُّبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ (٢٥) ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٢٦) أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيَضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٍ (٢٧) وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالدَّوَابِّ وَأَلْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ (٢٨)

The blind and those having sight will not be equal nor darkness and light, shade and heat, the living and the dead. It is only God Who makes those hear whom He wants to and you cannot make those who are in their graves hear you. You are only a warner. We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and warnings. And there is not a single community in which a warner has not come. And if these people reject you, then those before them also rejected. Their messengers came to them with veritable signs, with scriptures, and with a radiant Book. Then I seized these people. So see how My curse on them was! (19-26)

Did you not see that God sent down water from the sky? Thus We brought forth from it fruits of different colours. And in the mountains also there are streaks of various shades of white and red, and jet-black also. And human beings, animals and beasts are of different colours also. In a similar manner, only those among His servants will fear Him Who have knowledge. Indeed, God is Dominant and Forgiving. (27-28)

Explanation

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَى وَالْبَصِيرُ (١٩)¹⁹

The word أَعْمَى (blind) here signifies people whose mind and heart have become blind. The word بَصِيرٌ signifies people whose abilities of head and heart are alive and they use them. This verse sounds assurance to the Prophet (sws) and tells him that the response to his call will be different. Those who have obliterated the eyes of their faculties of intellect and whose hearts have become lifeless will not accept his call however much an effort he makes. Only those people will benefit from the radiance of the light he has who have insight in them. It is the law of the Almighty that those who keep alive and duly value their innate abilities find that their insight and guidance has been enhanced, and those who do not value these abilities, they are deprived of them what to speak of their enhancement. In Sūrah Naml, this subject is discussed thus:

إِنَّكَ لَا تُسْمِعُ الْمَوْتَى وَلَا تُسْمِعُ الصُّمَّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ مَا أَنْتَ بِهَادِي الْعُمَى

19. The blind and those having sight will not be equal.

عَنْ ضَلَّالَتِهِمْ إِنْ تُسْمِعُ إِلَّا مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا (٨٠-٨١)

You cannot make the dead listen to you nor the deaf when they are running after turning their backs. And you cannot also bring the blind back on track. You can only make those listen who profess belief in our revelations. (27:80-81)

وَلَا الظُّلُمَاتُ وَلَا النُّورُ (٢٠) وَلَا الظِّلُّ وَلَا الْحَرُورُ (٢١)²⁰

The verses state that just as there is darkness and light in this world and heat and shade as well and both counterparts in these pairs are not the same, similarly the two types of people mentioned above cannot be the same. However, just as hidden in darkness and light, shade and heat is the collective benefit of this world, in the same manner in the existence of these two types of people exists collective benefit. At other instances in the Qur'ān, this benefit is mentioned. At such instances, it is explained that since this world has been created by God to test the free-will of man hence wisdom entails that those people also be given respite till a certain period of time who do not duly value the abilities bestowed to them by God and spend their lives by following falsehood and not the truth.

Some scholars regard the recurrence of لَا as superfluous. In my opinion, this is not so. Its recurrence is meant for emphasis.

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَحْيَاءُ وَلَا الْأَمْوَاتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ (٢٢)²¹

What is said above is stated in this verse from another aspect: This was a time when the Prophet (sws) was very worried on the indifferent and evasive attitude adopted by his people. He feared that this may be because of some shortcoming on his part. To dispel this worry, the Almighty has assured him through various styles in this verse. He is told that his duty is to make the living listen to his message and not the dead. Those who abilities are functional and vibrant listen to him and also accept what he says. As for those who are spiritually and intellectually dead, they will never be able to respond to his calls however much he may want this to happen.

In the expression: إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ, the word إسماع means to urge and propel someone to hear and accept something. The expression implies that it is God Who blesses a person with the urge to listen and to accept and all intentions of God are governed by His wisdom. In this regard, his law is that those who keep alive the natural abilities bestowed to them by

20. Nor darkness and light, shade and heat.

21. The living and the dead. It is only God Who makes those hear whom He wants to and you cannot make those who are in their graves hear you.

Him find in themselves the divinely given urge to listen and understand further. On other hand, those who do not duly value their natural abilities are morally and spiritually dead; only God has the power to put life in them.

إِنْ أَنْتَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ (٢٣) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ (٢٤)²²

These verses delineate the bound and limits of the preaching responsibility of the Prophet (sws): he is only liable to inform them of the looming danger; he is not liable to make everyone accept his message. God has sent him with the truth. Each and everything he is informing people of is the truth and certain to materialize. His responsibility is to make those who listen to him aware of their good fate and to let those who turn away from him know of the dreadful fate that awaits them. He is not liable for anything beyond this; hence he should not be worried about them.

The words وَإِنْ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ address the Prophet (sws) and tell him that he is not the first warner in this world, God Has sent warners among previous nations as well and there is guidance for him and his people in the account of these warners. God will deal with him in the same manner as He dealt with His messengers and deal with his nation in the same way as He dealt with the previous nations.

وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَبِالزُّبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ (٢٥) ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٢٦)²³

This is a further explanation of what is stated above in concise words. The Prophet (sws) is told that if people are rejecting him, then this is nothing new. Earlier nations too rejected their respective messengers. This is an age old tradition. He should not think that this is the first time that a people of a messenger have behaved like this. The implication is that if this had happened for the first time, it could have been a cause of worry for him that perhaps it was due to his mistake that they are behaving like this. However, since all nations adopted this very attitude with their respective messenger one can see a persistent pattern in this.

The words جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَبِالزُّبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ imply that it is not

22. You are only a warner. We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and warnings. And there is not a single community in which a warner has not come.

23. And if these people reject you, then those before them also rejected. Their messengers came to them with veritable signs, with scriptures, and with a radiant Book. Then I seized these people. So see how My curse on them was!

the case that the messengers came empty-handed; on the contrary, they came with very lucid proofs, miracles, scriptures and with the clear Book of God. However, none of these could convince their addressees. In other words, the Prophet Muḥammad (sws) is being told that he should not expect that his addressees will accept faith if they are provided the sign they are demanding. All these signs, scriptures and books are of no use for such people.

The words الرُّبُورِ and الْبَيِّنَاتِ have a general connotation. All messengers of God were sent with them. The expression الْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ however refers to the Torah, as before the Qur'ān, it was the Torah that occupied the status of the lucid Book.

The words كَفَرُوا الَّذِينَ أَخَذْتُ express what the Almighty did with the nations which adopted the attitude described above. It is stated that when they reject their respective messenger, the Almighty seized them and what an exemplary punishment He meted out to them. The implication is that if Muḥammad's people also become adamant on their obduracy, the Almighty will deal in a similar manner with them. His law is the same for all.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ
بَيْضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ²⁴ (٢٧)

The reality that is communicated earlier in verses 20-22 is once again explained here in the light of some other examples found in this universe. Verses 23-26 are parenthetical in nature and address the Prophet Muḥammad (sws). Once they ended, the discourse switches to its original theme. It is stated that do not people see that God sends down rain from the heavens and as a result what is produced is not the same; things of different sorts and colour are produced. Thus beautiful, colourful and tasty fruits are borne at some places, while at some others defective and thorny bushes sprout. Same is the case with this divine rain in the form of the Qur'ān. Through it the abilities and potentials of the righteous develop while the evil found in others is exposed. This is because Satan will not easily put up with the Qur'ān; he will in fact instigate his followers to oppose it. The word أَلْوَانٌ does not merely occur in Arabic to mean "colour"; it also means "types" and "sorts". In the next portion of this verse also, the word is used in this very meaning.

24. Did you not see that God sent down water from the sky? Thus We brought forth from it fruits of different colours. And in the mountains also there are streaks of various shades of white and red, and jet-black also.

In Sūrah A'rāf, this aspect of the effects of rain is mentioned thus:

وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَبَاتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَالَّذِي خَبثَ لَا يَخْرُجُ إِلَّا نَكِدًا (٧: ٥٨)

And the land which is fertile, then with the directive of its Lord its vegetation looks good and the land which is defective bears vegetation which is defective. (7:58)

Readers are advised to look up my explanation of the above verse.

Consider now, the last part of the verse: وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيَضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَعَرَايِبُ سُودٌ. The word جُدَدٌ is the plural of جَدَّةٌ and is used for the stripes of various colours found on the backs of deer and mules; however, here it is used for large rocks and stone tablets whose stripes or rows are found in mountains.

The word عَرَايِبُ is the plural of غَرِيبٌ. It means “jet black.” It is generally used to emphasize the word أَسْوَدٌ (black). Thus if it is said that something is أَسْوَدُ غَرِيبٌ, it would mean that it is jet black. The question then arises is that why then does the word عَرَايِبُ occur before سُودٌ. This is because placing a word of emphasis before the noun it qualifies is against eloquence. Linguists have given different answers to this question. Some say that it is a *badal* (permutative) that occurs as an explication. If this interpretation is accepted, then it is true that a *badal* that comes for explication in fact denotes emphasis. In this case, it is as if the speaker repeats his statement in simple words so that it can be etched in the minds. The reason why black rocks and stones are referred to here with this emphasis is that just as there are black rocks in mountains, similarly, there are people among human beings who have black hearts; just as black rocks and white and red ones have separate uses, similarly, black-hearted people serve a purpose – for which they are given respite in this world by God.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْدَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ (٢٨) ²⁵

The verse states that like inanimate objects, variety and diversity is found in human beings, beasts and other life forms. The word أَلْوَان here does not mean “colour.” It is used in its broader meaning of “type” and “kind.” In other words, with regard to appearance, features, characteristics, habits, inner inclinations there exists a great difference

25. And human beings, animals and beasts are there of different colours also. In a similar manner, only those among His servants will fear Him Who have knowledge. Indeed, God is Dominant and Forgiving.

among them. The implication is that just as one cannot expect milk from every animal, one should not expect every person to have fear of God. Only those among God's servants will fear Him who have the radiance of insight and knowledge in them.

The word **عُلَمَاء** here is not used as a term; it is used in its literal meaning. Just as it is said in verse 18 earlier **يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ** (you can warn only those who fear their Lord even though they have not seen Him), the words stated here are: **إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ**. It is evident from this that one category of people is that which is a slave to the apparent and cannot look beyond; in fact, such people do not even bother to look beyond. Another category is of people that has the ability to look beyond the apparent and discover the reality behind a metaphor. They are the ones who give more importance to the demands of their intellect and soul rather than their carnal ones. It is these people who in reality are the best of mankind and deserve to be called **عُلَمَاء** (knowledgeable). It is these people who become fearful of God and respond to the message of His messengers.

Just as what is said earlier is meant to assure the Prophet (sws), the attributes **عَزِيزٌ** (powerful) and **عَفُورٌ** (forgiving) are mentioned in **إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ عَفُورٌ** for this very purpose. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should rest assured that those who are rejecting his message today can be seized by God whenever He wants to. However, besides being **عَزِيزٌ** (Powerful), God is also **عَفُورٌ** (Forgiving); hence as long as His wisdom entails, He gives respite to such people.

It is evident from these details that it is the true comprehension of God which is the source of true knowledge. He who does not possess this comprehension is devoid of knowledge even though he may memorize all kinds of books. Also evident from these details is that he who has a true comprehension of God will necessarily be a person who fears God. If a person does not have this fear, then it follows that he does not possess the true comprehension of God. It is this comprehension and fear of God that injects real life in all the thoughts and ideologies of mankind after which knowledge becomes really beneficial to it. Without these two, the intelligence of man ends up serving the purpose of Satan and finally leads him to ruin.

Here a question may arise in the minds of some people: it is evident from the previous verses that just as the Almighty has created different sorts of things in this universe and each has a purpose and meaning, similarly the existence of people who oppose the truth, are devoid of God's fear and are proponents of falsehood has a purpose and meaning. If this is the case, then why do such people deserve rebuke and punishment? Though I have continued to dispel this doubt in earlier

paragraphs, let me again point out that man has been created by God on the nature of God; hence man should positively respond to the instincts found in his nature. However, since human beings are not like animals and plants who do not have any will, many of them deviate from their nature and disobey the directives of their Lord. They deserve to be punished because of wrongly exercising their will and intention. However, in spite of this God gives them respite so that the truth is conclusively communicated to them and so that their opposition can become a source of trial for the believers. Viewed thus, the existence of such people is in accordance with wisdom and collective benefit and the Almighty because of this very reason gives them respite in this world. However, viewed from another angle, these people deserve punishment because they did not give due regard to their faculties of sight and hearing and while following their base desires wrongly exercised their will and authority.

Section IV Verses (29-38)

What was stated in the previous section as a principle is applied in the succeeding verses on actual circumstances. It is explained that who among the people of the previous nations deserve to be called knowledgeable and will be the ones who profess in the Qur'ān and what attitude the virtuous and the wrongdoers from among these people will now adopt with the nation the Almighty has bestowed His Book on. After that, the consequences of the deeds of both these types of people are described. Readers may now proceed to study these verses in the light of this background.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرْجُونَ تِجَارَةً لَّن تَبُورَ (٢٩) لِيُوفِّيَهُمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ (٣٠) وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِعِبَادِهِ لَخَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ (٣١) ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مُّقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ يُاذِنُ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ (٣٢) جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُجَلِّونَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ (٣٣) وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ (٣٤) الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِن فَضْلِهِ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ (٣٥) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقْضَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ

فَيَمُوتُوا وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ مِّنْ عَذَابِهَا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي كُلَّ كَفُورٍ (٣٦) وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِحُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَن تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ فَذُوقُوا فَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِن نَّصِيرٍ (٣٧) إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَالِمُ غَيْبِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ (٣٨) هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَن كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا (٣٩)

Indeed, those who recite the Book of God and are diligent in their prayer and spend in private and in public from the sustenance We have blessed them with may hope of a deal that will never be inflicted with loss. So that God may reward them of their deeds and also increase their gains because of His grace. Indeed, He is forgiving and one who accepts. And the Book We have revealed to you is the truth confirming the previous prophecies. God, indeed, is aware of His servants and observes them. (29-31)

Then We have bestowed the Book on those of Our servants whom We chose. So there are some who sin against their souls, some who follow a middle course, and some who, by God's grace, outdo one another in righteous deeds. This is the greatest blessing. For them shall be gardens of Eden which they shall enter. There they shall be made to wear bracelets of gold and pearls, and there their apparel shall be of silk. And they will say: "Gratitude be to God Who has taken away grief from us. Indeed, our Lord is Forgiving and One Who accepts; Who through His grace has admitted us to this mansion of residence. Here we shall face no difficulty nor be inflicted with weariness." (32-35)

As for the disbelievers, for them is the fire of Hell. Neither shall death deliver them, nor shall its torment even be reduced from them. Thus shall We avenge every ungrateful person and they shall cry out there: "Lord! Take us out from here; we will now do pious deeds – different from what we have been doing till now." – Have We not given you enough life so that anyone who would like to be reminded in it can be reminded? And an informer also reached you. So taste this torment. No one shall help the wrongdoers. God knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth. Indeed, He fully knows the secrets found in the hearts. (36-38)

Explanation

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرْجُونَ

تِجَارَةً لَّنْ تَبُورَ (٢٩)²⁶

This verse gives a description of the people who are called knowledgeable by the previous verse: *إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ* (only those among God's servants will fear him who have knowledge). It is stated that those who recite the Book of God, are diligent in their prayer, spend generously openly and secretly from the sustenance God has give them are the ones who fear God. This spending is such a deal that there is no fear of any loss in it in future; its blessings will, on the contrary, continue to increase.

Though this can refer to all the righteous who have these qualities in them; however, I am inclined to think that it refers to the scholars of the People of the Book who professed faith in the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān has praised them at many instances. The reason for my inclination is that after a mention of these qualities occurs a mention of the righteous and wrongdoers of the Ishmaelites in verse 32 ahead; they are mentioned by the words: *ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا* (Then We bestowed the Book on those of Our servants whom We chose.) Here the word *ثُمَّ* evidences the fact that those mentioned previously are the ones who were the recipients of God's Book before the Qur'ān and they with the grace of God adhered to its teachings – as a result of which were fortunate enough to profess faith in the Qur'ān as well.

Here, three qualities are specially mentioned viz a viz these righteous people of the Book: reciting the verses of the Qur'ān, adherence to the prayer and spending in the way of God. The reason is that it is these three things which are the real source of preserving religion and the real symbol of God's fear. The Qur'ān has mentioned this very clearly that the Jews had forgotten their scripture and let go of the prayer and had become greedy misers; hence, they were deprived of the treasure of faith. Only those professed faith in the Qur'ān from among them who were secure from these maladies.

The phrase *يَرْجُونَ تِجَارَةً لَّنْ تَبُورَ* insinuates that those who amassed wealth rightfully or wrongfully by giving preference to the life of this world and each of them who wanted to become a billionaire will end up ruined and broke; however, those who spend in the way of God are investing in a deal which has no chance of any loss.

26. Indeed, those who recite the Book of God and are diligent in their prayer and spend in private and in public from the sustenance We have blessed them with may hope of a deal that will never be inflicted with loss.

لِيُوقِفَهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَيَزِيدَهُمْ مِّنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ²⁷(٣٠)

This verse alludes to the real motive of their spending in the way of God and also to the promise of the Almighty of great reward to them: whatever they spend is not to brag and show off nor do they want any remuneration for it nor do they express this as a favour to others; they spend only to please God so that He may fully reward them and give them even more out of His grace. Thus their Lord will deal with them according to their expectations because He forgives mistakes and blemishes and values the deeds of His servants. The attributes of God غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ mentioned here are meant to encourage people: God accepts their virtues while forgiving their vices and accepts the smallest of good deeds by duly valuing it.

وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِعِبَادِهِ لَخَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ²⁸(٣١)

This verse invites the righteous among the People of the Book to accept faith. They are told that the Book which has been revealed to them is the truth. Hence all seekers of the truth should whole heartedly welcome it and full adhere to it. The emphasis found in هُوَ الْحَقُّ refers to the fact that the Book Almighty gave them before this became an amalgam of right and wrong because of their alterations; hence, they were deprived of the favour of truth. Now in the form of the Qur'ān the truth has once again been given to them in its pristine and perfect form so that it can become a source of guidance for people.

The words مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ express an argument that substantiates the divine nature of this Book specifically for the People of the Book in a conclusive manner. It is mentioned at many places in the Qur'ān: this Book has come to confirm the prophecies that were already made about its arrival in the previous scriptures. I have referred to these prophecies in detail at an appropriate place of this exegesis.

The words إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِعِبَادِهِ لَخَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ state that the Almighty has made this arrangement of protecting the truth because He is ever-watching the affairs of His creatures and continues to observe the good and evil they work. So when He saw that the people have been deprived of the guidance He gave them because of the dishonesty of the custodians of

27. So that God may reward them of their deeds and also increase their gains because of His grace. Indeed, He is forgiving and one who accepts.

28. And the Book We have revealed to you is the truth confirming the previous prophecies. God, indeed, is aware of His servants and observes them.

this Book, He made fresh arrangements to protect it. Had He not made this fresh arrangement, it would have meant that He does not care about the good and evil of His creatures. The fact is that not only is He not careless about them, He is fully aware of them and all their minutest details are in His knowledge.

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مُقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَائِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ بإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ (٣٢)²⁹

This verse mentions the system which the Almighty had made to guide mankind. The words الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا refer to the Ishmaelites or the unlettered Arabs in their collective capacity. It is from among them that God had promised Abraham (sws) to send His last messenger. It was through this last messenger that mankind was meant to be given the last and final *sharī'ah* of the Almighty. The verse states that the Almighty chose another group from His people and made the recipient of His Book. Making them recipients means that before them those who had been made the recipients of this Book ie., the Israelites were not found worthy of this position. The position of leadership they held was confiscated from them and was bestowed to the Ishmaelites.

This position of the unlettered Arabs is mentioned in the following verses of Sūrah Jumu'ah: هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ: (It is He who sent forth among the unlettered a Messenger from among them who recites to them His revelations and purifies them and instructs them in the Book and in wisdom, (62:2)). At many places, the Qur'ān has referred to this position and has invited them to accept faith and give it due importance. If they do not do so, the leadership of the world – which is a divinely bestowed honour on them – will be confiscated from them. In Sūrah Nisā', this position of honour of the unlettered Arabs is mentioned thus:

أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ فَقَدْ آتَيْنَا آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَآتَيْنَاهُمْ مُلْكًا عَظِيمًا فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ آمَنَ بِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ صَدَّ عَنْهُ وَكَفَى بِجَهَنَّمَ سَعِيرًا (٤: ٥١-٥٢)

Are they [the Israelites] envying others [the Ishmaelites] on what

29. Then We have bestowed the Book on those of Our servants whom We chose. So there are some who sin against their souls, some who follow a middle course, and some who, by God's grace, outdo one another in righteous deeds. This is the greatest blessing.

God has blessed them with? [If this is the case, then let them be as jealous as they can be] We gave Abraham's descendants [the Ishmaelites] our *sharī'ah* and *ḥikmah*, and an illustrious kingdom. So some among them [the Ishmaelites] have professed faith in [this Book] and others who have turned away from it. And sufficient is the furious fire of Hell for such people. (4:51-54)

Readers are advised to look up my explanation of the above mentioned verse in order to understand the verse under discussion. Just as in the above verse, the Ishmaelites are referred to in their collective capacity and there is a mention of they being given the Book and Wisdom and a great kingdom, in a similar manner in the verse under discussion too it is mentioned that this position was bestowed to them in their collective capacity. The Jews were very jealous of this position of theirs and one of the big reasons that they opposed Muḥammad (sws) was that they thought that if his prophethood is established, then the position of religious leadership which they hitherto held would be transferred to their opponents: the Ishmaelites. At many instances, the Qur'ān has informed the Arabs of this ill-intent of the Israelites and has invited them to duly value the status bestowed on them by the Almighty as well as the position for which He has chosen them; they should not let their enemies achieve their objective by opposing it. In a similar way, here too their chosen status is alluded to so that they should give it due importance and not be deprived of it.

Consider next, the words: *فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ مُّقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ*. These words point to the individual attitude the Ishmaelites adopted in response to this favour of God. It is stated that, there are three categories of people among them: the first are those who wrong their souls; in other words, they are trying their utmost to oppose it; neither are they accepting it themselves nor letting others accept it. In the above cited verses of Sūrah Nisā, they are mentioned by the words: *وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ صَدَّ عَنْهُ* (and others who have turned away from it). This very category is alluded to in the verse under discussion by the words: *ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ*. The implication is that by opposing the new call they are wronging their souls because they are depriving themselves of God's greatest blessing and leading themselves to Hell. However, as far as the religion of God is concerned, no harm can come to it because of their opposition. In the Qur'ān, the word *ظلم* generally connotes polytheism. In Sūrah Ṣaffāt the words are: *وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ مُبِينٌ* (37: 113) (And We blessed him and Isaac both. And among their [Abraham's and Isaac's] offspring are those who do deeds in a befitting manner and others who clearly sinned against their souls, (37:113)). Our exegetes have generally interpreted

the words الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا of the verse under discussion to refer to the Muslim *ummah* and then have concluded from this without any basis that those who are the wrongdoers and have sinned against themselves shall also be forgiven. I have attempted to explain the true occasion and context of the verse after which no needs remains to refute the view of our exegetes. Narratives ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās (rta) and Mujāhid³⁰ also support my view. These authorities are of the opinion that the words ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ refer to the very people who are mentioned in Sūrah Wāqī‘ah by the expression: أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ (٩: ٥٦).

The expression مِنْهُمْ مُّقْتَصِدٌ refers to the second category of people. The word مُّقْتَصِدٌ means the “the middle ones.” In other words, they are the people who neither oppose this call of faith nor have the courage to support it. Their lack of opposition is clearly indicative of the fact that they do realize the veracity of this call yet they are not very strongly driven as to openly support it while disregarding any opposition. By using this expression for them, the Qur’ān has created hope that they are not the ones who will be deprived from this blessing like the ones of the first category; soon or late, their hesitancy will be dispelled and they will become the ardent supporters of this call.

The expression وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ refers to the third category. Those who belong to this category have such sharp ears for the truth that every call of the truth appeals to them immediately. So strong is their determination and resolve that when something appeals to them, they surmount all the difficulties of this path in one leap. They do not desist from the biggest of sacrifice to support or defend this call. On the contrary, while valiantly facing all adversities to outrun others in the sphere of virtue are even prepared to lay down their lives for it. This is a reference to the foremost in faith (*sābiqūn al-awwālūn*) in the times of the Prophet (sws) whose leader was Abū Bakr (rta).

This third category is qualified by the words يَإِذْنُ اللَّهِ which means that not every one can be a part of it unless God wants to. This is in fact a reference to the established practice of God which He has set for those who strive in His cause and those who desist in this regard. I have referred to this established practice at many places in this *tafsīr*.

The words ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ delineate the status which this category of people will be bestowed with. At the same time, there exists in these words a subtle exhortation for the second category: they still have time to come forward and make an effort to take their share in this great blessing; they should leave aside hesitancy and boldly take this step. I

30. See: Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, vol. 3, 556.

will content myself to insinuations here. God willing, all its aspects will be discussed in the exegesis of Sūrah Wāqī'ah.

جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ (٣٣)³¹

Here at the end, the reward of these valiant people is mentioned: for them will be gardens of Eden in which they will be admitted to. In other words, their stay and amusement in these gardens will not be temporary: it will be forever. The passive verb يُحَلَّوْنَ signifies honour and respect. The mention bracelets of gold and pearls and their silk-apparel is merely to give us some idea of the favours of Paradise. The reality of these things is only known to God. One will only have an idea of them when one sees them in the Hereafter. In the earlier ages, kings would wear pearls and bracelets of gold. For this reason, to give an idea of the apparel of Paradise, these expressions are used.

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ (٣٤) الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِن فَضْلِهِ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ (٣٥)³²

The verse implies that when the dwellers of Paradise will see all the promises of God have materialized, they will spontaneously express gratitude to Him and say that the promises for which they lived and died have been fulfilled far beyond their expectations; all their sorrows have vanished; they neither have any regrets of the past nor any fears of the future; their Lord Who is merciful has forgiven them and has accepted and acknowledged all their virtues. At another place, this gratitude by the dwellers of Paradise is stated thus: (وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٠:١٠)) (And their last statement will be: "Gratitude to God the Lord of the worlds," (10:10)).

The word دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ refers to an abode of eternal residence. They would exclaim that before that they were in an abode of limited residence and always considered it so; the Almighty, out of His grace, has now placed them in an everlasting abode; neither do they face any toil nor any tiredness nor any sorrow. It may be kept in mind that even the most

31. For them shall be gardens of Eden which they shall enter. There they shall be made to wear bracelets of gold and pearls, and there their apparel shall be of silk.

32. And they will say: "Gratitude be to God Who has taken away grief from us. Indeed, our Lord is Forgiving and One Who accepts; Who through His grace has admitted us to this mansion of residence. Here we shall face no difficulty nor be inflicted with weariness."

blissful of states can make a person sorrowful if it is not changed and added to according to his wish. Such is the nature of God's Paradise that a dweller will be in such multifarious and diverse forms of bliss that he will never feel bored.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقْضَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ فَيَمُوتُوا وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِهَا
كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي كُلَّ كَافٍ (٣٦) وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي
كُنَّا نَعْمَلْ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَنْ تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ فَذُوقُوا فَمَا
لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ تَصِيرٍ (٣٧)³³

These verses depict the fate of the disbelievers in Hell. There neither will they be able to live nor will death overtake them to put an end to their torment nor will this torment will be lessened to give them some respite. A word to the effect فَلْيَسْتَرْجِعُوا (so that they receive comfort) is suppressed after عَذَابِهَا because of linguistic considerations.

The words كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي كُلَّ كَافٍ imply that what has been said is not specific to the criminals and wrongdoers of the past; every ingrate and wretch will receive the same punishment. The implication is that these people too will deserve the same punishment who at that time were denying the Book of God. This statement has linked the discourse to the situation that existed at the time of its revelation.

The words وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلْ state that while being in Hell, they will plead to God to grant them respite so that they could go back in the previous world and behave differently from what they had been doing earlier.

The words أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَنْ تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ express the answer they will get from God: were they not granted enough respite which was sufficient for them to pay heed to God's reminder; moreover, a messenger too had come to them to warn them; so for what purpose are they asking for respite; no one can now become their supporter; now they will be left to taste the punishment which they deserve.

It is evident from this verse that those whom the Almighty has given

33. As for the disbelievers, for them is the fire of Hell. Neither shall death deliver them, nor shall its torment even be reduced from them. Thus shall We avenge every ungrateful person and they shall cry out there: "Lord! Take us out from here; we will now do pious deeds – different from what we have been doing till now." – Have We not given you enough life so that anyone who would like to be reminded in it can be reminded? And an informer also reached you. So taste this torment. No one shall help the wrongdoers.

enough life span and the truth has also been conclusively communicated to them through a warner, no concession will be given to them. However, those people who died or were killed before they reached mature age will be treated with relative lenience.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَالِمُ غَيْبِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ (٣٨)³⁴

Two things are evident from this verse: Firstly, God is aware of all the secrets of the heavens and the earth; hence no one should regard these warnings as bluff; they are bound to materialize one day before everyone. Secondly, the Almighty is also aware of the lies spoken by people who want respite so that they can do righteous deeds: if these people are given this chance they will again do what they used to do.

Section V: Verses (39-45)

The Idolaters of Arabia are threatened in the succeeding verses that they are not the first people in this land; they are in fact the successors of the previous nations: so they should seek a lesson from their circumstances and the fate they met. If these nations, in spite of being more powerful than them were destroyed because of rejecting their respective messenger, how will they save themselves from the wrath of God? The law of God is the same for all; it cannot be changed for anyone. They should remember that it is not their deities who are holding the heavens and the earth intact; it is God Who is holding them together. If God let goes of them no one else can hold them together. If in spite of their rebelliousness God is giving them respite, then this should not lead them to wrong conclusions. God is not hasty in seizing people; however, when He does, no one can escape His grasp.

In this regard, they have also been warned that they used to swear oaths that if a messenger comes to them, they will become the most rightly-guided nation of the world; however, when the messenger actually came, out of sheer arrogance, they set about to oppose him and to conspire against him day and night; whereas, the fact of the matter is that the very people who weave the web of conspiracy get caught in this web.

A little deliberation shows that in this last section of the *sūrah*, the verse-rhymes have changed from the previous sections. This sudden change in intonation points to the change in the tone and pitch of the speaker and this in itself is meant to direct the attention of the addressee

34. God knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth. Indeed, He fully knows the secrets found in the hearts.

to some new aspect.

Readers may now proceed to study the verses.

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا (٣٩) قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ شُرَكَاءَكُمُ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا فَهُمْ عَلَى بَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْهُ بَلْ إِن يَبْدُ الظَّالِمُونَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا (٤٠) إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمَسِّكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّن بَعْدِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا (٤١) وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَئِنْ جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ لَّيَكُونُنَّ أَهْدَىٰ مِنْ إِحْدَى الْأُمَمِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ مَّا زَادَهُمْ إِلَّا نُفُورًا (٤٢) اسْتَكْبَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَكْرَ السَّيِّئِ وَلَا يَحِيقُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ فَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا (٤٣) أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَكَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعْجِزَهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيمًا قَدِيرًا (٤٤) وَلَوْ يُوَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ بَصِيرًا (٤٥)

It is He who has made you a successor in the earth. So he who professes disbelief will bear its consequences and for the disbeliever his disbelief in the sight of His Lord will only increase His wrath. (39)

Say: "Behold the partners you invoke besides God. Show me what part of the earth have they created! Do they have a share in the heavens? Whether We have given them a scripture so that they have some evident proof? In fact, these wrongdoers are making false promises with one another. (40)

It is God who keeps the heavens and the earth from falling. And should they fall, none can hold them back but Him. Indeed, He is Gracious and Forgiving. (41)

And they have sworn solemnly by God that if a warner should come to warn them, they would accept his guidance more readily than did all the other nations. Yet when a warner came to them, then this only increased their aversion and evil scheming because of being arrogant in the land. And evil schemes capture only him who makes these evil schemes. Thus they are not waiting but for the established practice of God which materialized for those before them. So you will neither find any change

in the established practice of God nor will you find it to cease. Have they not travelled through the land to see the fate of those who were before them even though they were far mightier than they? And there is nothing in the heavens and the earth beyond the power of God. All-Knowing is He, and Mighty. (42-44)

And if God was to punish people immediately for their deeds, He would not have left a single living being on the earth. But He gives them respite till a prescribed time. So when this time expires, God Himself is watching all His servants. (45)

Explanation

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا (39)³⁵

This verse warns the Quraysh. They are told that the political leadership they enjoy in the land of Arabia is neither because of their own effort nor are they the first ones to acquire it. Many nations which preceded them were destroyed by the Almighty because of their arrogance and disbelief. They have now succeeded these nations; however, if they too adopt the same attitude as these nations, then they should be prepared to meet the same fate. God's barometer of justice regarding the rise and fall of nations is unflinching and unbiased. They will repeat the history written by the nations whose accounts have been narrated to them. This topic is discussed in detail in verse 165 of Sūrah An'ām and verse 100 of Sūrah A'rāf.

The words فَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرُهُمْ إِلَّا خَسَارًا of the verse imply that the disbelief of a person cannot harm God in any way; on the contrary, it is the person who professes disbelief who bears its dire consequences. God is not dependent on anyone; it is the people who are dependent on God. If they adhere to disbelief they will augment the wrath of God and not harm God and this will lead them to destruction both in this world and in the next.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ شُرَكَاءَكُمُ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْهُ بَلْ إِن يَعِدُ الظَّالِمُونَ بَعْضُهُمْ

35. It is He who has made you a successor in the earth. So he who professes disbelief will bear its consequences and for the disbeliever his disbelief in the sight of His Lord will only increase His wrath.

بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا (٤٠)³⁶

This verse directs their attention to the baselessness of their deities whom they associate with God and on whose basis they do not fear Him. The word *أَرَأَيْتُمْ* on such occasions signifies amazement and disgust. They are asked that if these deities have created anything in the heavens and the earth, then they should show it to the Prophet Muḥammad (sws) or inform him if they have any share in governing the heavens.

In the section *أَمْ آتَيْنَاهُمْ كِتَابًا فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْهُ بَلْ إِنِ يَعِدُ الظَّالِمُونَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا* the style of address has shifted from direct to indirect; this has increased the amazement and disgust expressed previously. It is said that if they cannot substantiate any role for their deities in the heavens and the earth, then on what grounds have they made them associates of God? Has God given them a book in which He has pointed out His partners and it is a result of this proof that they have made these partners?

The words *بَلْ إِنِ يَعِدُ الظَّالِمُونَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا* imply that none of the above options is correct. Neither do they have any argument in support of their deities nor any sanction; in fact, such people who wrong their souls are misleading one another without any argument or sanction. They wrongly state that such and such an idol has such and such powers and worshipping them entails such and such blessings. All these are false promises made to them by their leaders.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُنْسِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنْ بَعْدِهِ
إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا (٤١)³⁷

The verse implies that if these people are in the deception that their deities will protect them from the punishment with which they are being threatened, then they should remember that it is only the Almighty Who holds the heavens and the earth in their orbits. If He loosens their reins, no one has the power to hold them and in the blink of an eye all this system will crash.

The words *إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا* imply that in spite of their arrogance and haughtiness if God gives respite to people, it is because He is Gracious

36. Say: "Behold the partners you invoke besides God. Show me what part of the earth have they created! Do they have a share in the heavens? Whether We have given them a scripture so that they have some evident proof? In fact, these wrongdoers are making false promises with one another.

37. It is God who keeps the heavens and the earth from falling. And should they fall, none can hold them back but Him. Indeed, He is Gracious and Forgiving.

and Merciful. He does not show haste in punishing them He ignores them and gives them respite so that people who want to are afforded with an opportunity to mend their ways.

وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَئِنْ جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ لَّيَكُونُنَّ أَهْدَىٰ مِنْ إِحْدَى الْأُمَمِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ مَا زَادَهُمْ إِلَّا نُفُورًا (٤٢)³⁸

Since the people of Arabia were unlettered ie. not conversant with the *sharī'ah*, the People of the Book, in particular, the Jews regarded them to be inferior; so much so, their jurists had issued an edict that usurping the wealth placed in the trust of the unlettered and to charge interest from them was absolutely okay. I have referred to these self-proclaimed edicts while explaining the verse: (٧٥ :٣) لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ (We shall not be held answerable in the matters of the Unlettered, (3:75)). When the Idolaters of Arabia would hear such comments of the Jews, a feeling of inferiority would naturally arise in them, and in response these Idolaters would on oath arrogantly swear before them that if ever a messenger is sent to them, they will prove themselves to be more rightly guided than other nations.

It may be kept in consideration that the predictions found in the previous scriptures regarding the advent of the last messenger clearly state that he will come in the Ishmaelites, as is explained in the exegesis of Sūrah A'rāf. Though the Jewish scholars would hide these predictions, there were scholars among them in particular the Christians who were waiting for a messenger among the Arabs. The Qur'ān has referred to this in very commendable words thus: وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰ أَعْيُنُهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا مِنَ الْحَقِّ (٥:٨٣) (And when they listen to that which was revealed to the Messenger of God, you see their eyes shed tears because of recognizing the truth, (5:83)). Because of such scholars, there existed a tradition among the Ishmaelites as well that a messenger will be sent to them. They even expressed this before the Jews that if a messenger comes to them they will not prove meek and weak like the Jews and in fact take lead in accepting his guidance. While reminding them of this commitment of theirs, the Qur'ān has expressed sorrow: they used to make tall claims of helping and supporting the messenger; yet his advent only increased their aversion. Thus attitude of theirs is

38. And they have sworn solemnly by God that if a warner should come to warn them, they would accept his guidance more readily than did all the other nations. Yet when a warner came to them, then this only increased their aversion and evil scheming because of being arrogant in the land.

also mentioned in Sūrah Ṣāffāt in the following words:

وَإِنْ كَانُوا لَيَقُولُنَّ لَوْ أَنَّ عِنْدَنَا ذِكْرًا مِّنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ لَكُنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلَصِينَ
فَكَفَرُوا بِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٧: ١٦٧-١٧٠)

And indeed these people used to say: “Had we any teaching of the earlier generations we would have been among God’s chosen servants.” But they rejected it; so they shall soon come to know. (37:167-170)

اسْتِكْبَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَكْرُ السَّيِّئِ وَلَا يَحِيقُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا
سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ فَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا وَلَن تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا (٤٣: ٣٩)

The verse states the reason that has led these people to show aversion and disgust to the messenger of God: arrogance. The truth is fully evident to them; yet they are not willing to sacrifice at any cost the position of authority and leadership they hold. For this reason, they are bent upon opposing this blatant truth. They fear that if they accept the prophethood of Muḥammad (sws) they will lose this position.

The words الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ are co-ordinated to نُفُورًا. In other words, when the messenger with whom they claimed adherence arrived, they became his ardent enemies and became involved in filthy conspiracies against him in order to harm him. Since the word مَكْرُ (scheme) also occurs in a positive meaning, the word السَّيِّئُ (evil) qualifies it to refer to the nature of these schemes. In verse 10 also, their evil conspiracies and the fate they will meet is alluded to.

The words وَمَا يَحِيقُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ imply that anyone who conspires against the truth in fact conspires against his own self. He apparently weaves this web for others; but he himself is the first one to get caught in it. He who opposes a person who guides people to the truth wanders away from the truth and ruins his fate. He cannot harm others by this conspiracy without God’s permission but leads himself come what may to destruction.

In the section of the verse فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ the word يَنْظُرُونَ means “waiting” and in سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ certain words are suppressed in accordance with linguistic principles. If all these suppressions are

39. Because of being arrogant in the land. And evil schemes capture only him who makes these evil schemes. Thus they are not waiting but for the established practice of God which materialized for those before them. So you will neither find any change in the established practice of God nor will you find it to cease.

unfolded, the overall statement would be to the effect: فَهَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا سُنَّتَ اللَّهِ فِي الْأَوَّلِينَ. In other words, if because of their arrogance and aversion from the truth, these people have taken to opposing it and conspiring against it, then this means that they are waiting for the established practice of God which materialized for other nations to materialize for themselves as well. And just as these nations were destroyed for denying their respective messenger, they too will be destroyed.

The words فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا emphatically sound an assurance to the Prophet (sws). He is told that if this is what these people are waiting for, then he should rest assured that the practice of God neither changes nor fails to materialize. By stating that it does not change, the implication is that it is the same and equal for all nations; it is not possible that the attitude which led a nation to doom if adopted by another not lead it to doom as well. By stating that it does not fail to materialize, the implication is that when the time comes it will happen at all cost. No one will be able to stop it or change its course.

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَكُنُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً
وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعْجِزَهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيمًا قَدِيرًا (٤٤)⁴⁰

Attention is directed in this verse to the signs and remnants of previous nations found in Arabia on which the practice of God materialized. They are asked whether they have ever roamed about in their country to witness the remnants of their predecessor nations who were far mightier than they themselves but met the same fate for denying the prophets of God.

It is evident from the words أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا that they have in fact moved about in the land a lot and have passed by the ruins of the nations that were divinely punished but they never reflected on what led these nations to this fate. Yet, what was really required was to seek a lesson from them. They still have the time to observe these ruins and learn a lesson from them. As for might and power, the Quraysh cannot match them the slightest but when the Almighty seized them, they could not escape from His grasp. There is nothing in the heavens and earth which is beyond His grasp. His knowledge embraces all and nothing is beyond His observation. At the same time, He has power over everything

40. Have they not travelled through the land to see the fate of those who were before them even though they were far mightier than they? And there is nothing in the heavens and the earth beyond the power of God. All-Knowing is He, and Mighty.

and nothing is beyond His power. The implication is that who can escape from someone who is perfect and all-embracing in His knowledge and power.

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَخَّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ آجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجَلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ بَصِيرًا (٤٥)⁴¹

This verse directs our attention to another aspect of the established practice of God under discussion: such wrongdoers shall definitely be punished yet the Almighty never seizes people immediately for their misdeeds. No one could have stopped Him if He wanted to do so; He can obliterate every living being from the face of the earth; However, He is Gracious and Forgiving. Thus He gives respite to people till an appointed time. The reason is to give an opportunity to those who want to repent and mend their ways and to not leave the obdurate with any excuse. Once this time expires, the Almighty will assess their fate.

Words to the effect عَلَىٰ عَجَل are suppressed after بِمَا كَسَبُوا. What is suppressed is evident from the words: وَلَكِنْ يُؤَخَّرُهُمْ.

With the grace of God, this brings us to the end of this *sūrah*: فالحمد لله (so gratitude be to God for this).

Raḥmānābād

4th February 1975

41. And if God was to punish people immediately for their deeds, He would not have left a single living being on the earth. But He gives them respite till a prescribed time. So when this time expires, the God Himself is watching all His servants.